

A TRACT FOR THE SOLDIER

BY REV. J. A. PROCTOR.

I PRESUME you have a leisure hour. If so, it may be interesting to you to peruse a few thoughts which I purpose to set down in simple language and address to you. Every soldier of our Confederacy is an object of great interest to those for whom he is fighting. Sometimes the soldier is disposed to doubt this. Letters from home come but seldom; his name is not mentioned in the newspaper; he sees himself as only one of a great multitude, "lost like a drop in the boundless main," and he concludes that he is uncared for and well-nigh forgotten. Soldier, this is not so. There are but few in our whole country who are not anxiously concerned in regard to your condition. Compared with our entire population, there are but few heartless speculators, and there are hardly any whose hearts are in sympathy with the Yankee Government. All the rest of our people feel a constant solicitude for the brave soldiers who are enduring hardships, and fearlessly facing the dangers of the battle-field, in defence of Southern honor and Southern rights. They are concerned for your bodily condition. When they meet around the table to share the food with which a kind Providence has supplied them, they think of your scanty and hard fare, and would joyfully divide their portion with you. When the wintry winds are howling around their dwellings,

and the rain pours down in torrents, or the snow is covering the earth and chilling the air, they remember the poor soldiers who are exposed to it all, and would gladly protect them from the storm. To hear that any of our soldiers are without blankets, or clothing, or shoes, sends a pang to every true Southron's heart. Our people know that you have enough to suffer even when best provided for, and I am very greatly mistaken if they will not do all in their power to make your condition as comfortable as your circumstances will admit.

But, soldier, your people at home are not merely concerned for your bodily condition, they are concerned for your moral and spiritual welfare. Not all, it is true, who are interested in your physical well-being are careful of your religious condition, but there are thousands at home who feel the deepest interest in this subject, while they are not forgetful of the former. There are *mothers* here who, in the fear of God and in the faith of the Gospel, are sending up earnest prayers to heaven for the sons whom God has given them. They are praying not only that God may protect their boys in the day of battle and from the diseases of the camp, but that He will preserve them from the vices of the army, and make them upright, honorable, high-minded Christian men. *Soldier, have you a mother?* There are fathers and sisters here, who have brothers and sons in the field, believe in God, that daily and fervently pray for God's spiritual blessings on their brothers and sons in the army; and the Church of Christ, in all its branches, feels this solicitude pressing on its great heart a mighty weight of responsibility. From every congregation in the land, fervent supplications for blessings on the army are sent up every Sabbath; and in the stillness of the closet, at morning, noon and evening of every day, the prayers of the Sabbath are earnestly repeated. Societies have been organized for the especial purpose of pre-

meeting the religious interests of the soldier; holy, God-fearing men have been employed to act as colporteurs, and thousands of religious tracts are being daily distributed in the hospitals and in the camps. It is a matter of devout thanksgiving to Almighty God that all this interest has not been manifested in vain. Cheering accounts of religious revivals come in from almost every department of the army. It is not extravagant to say that thousands of soldiers, who were unconcerned before, have been converted to God since this war began. Some of these are now living to adorn the doctrines of the Saviour, and some of them are filling soldiers' graves; but they died in the triumphs of a Saviour's love.

Soldier, you have witnessed this interest in your spiritual welfare. You have seen the colporteur in his daily rounds, and you have read some of the tracts; but let me ask you how has the exhibition of this interest on the part of your friends at home affected you?

The writer of these lines is to you, soldier, an unknown stranger. Your eyes and his, it is probable, never met. You may never see him until the conflicts and storms of worldly life are over. But as he writes these lines he feels the sympathies of a common kindred, and his heart moves within him in strong desire to do you good. Come, then, and let us reason together, for a little season, on this most important concern that relates to man. I shall ask you one question, which I hope you will patiently consider. I can not hear your answer; but God is ever near you; His eyes behold you, and His ears understand the voiceless language of your heart.

Are you a Christian? Perhaps you answer, *yes*.— You look back to the time when your soul first felt the peace of God. It was a happy day. If I were with you to-day it would give me pleasure to hear you recount the comforts of that blest occasion. It is well to speak

often of the time of our conversion. If we have no hearers who will take an interest in the story, we should at least meditate upon it in our own hearts. If you have been in God's service long, you have no doubt often felt refreshed by singing that sweet hymn of Dr. Doddridge, beginning:

Oh, happy day that fixed my choice
 On Thee, my Saviour and my God.
 Well may this glowing heart rejoice,
 And tell its raptures all abroad.

It must be especially pleasant to the soldier who was converted at home to call up the memory of that day. He goes back to the church where his fathers worshipped—"forms and faces" of dearly loved ones, which perhaps "he shall see no more," stand up before him, and crowd around him—and for a moment he imagines that the war is ended and the endearing associations of former life returned. But my friend let me call you away from this pleasing meditation, to remind you that you have had many strong temptations and many terrible struggles with the the enemy of souls since you first became a Christian, and to assure you that, in all probability, if you live much longer, you will have many more. Oh, be strong for the coming conflicts. Prepare yourself by reading God's holy word, frequent meditations and earnest prayers.

The boatman's oar may pause upon the galley,
 The soldier sleep beneath his plumed crest,
 And peace may fold her wing o'er hill and valley,
 But thou, oh, Christian, *must not take thy rest.*

As a good soldier, in your country's service, you "endure hardness"—sometimes advancing, sometimes retreating, sometimes without food and sometimes exposed storm and cold, sometimes in health and sometimes

sick—but *always*, with unconquered will, your watchword is “liberty or death.” So likewise, as the soldier of Jesus Christ, you must be firm and strong. Hold fast to your profession, maintain your integrity, trust in the living God. If you fall, be not utterly cast down, but rise up, and in the name of Jesus, who lives in Heaven to intercede for his tempted followers, determine to try again. May God help you, Christian soldier, to “fight the good fight of faith, and *lay hold* on eternal life!”

Perhaps your answer is, *I was once a Christian*. Poor backslider! While battling with carnal weapons against the enemy of your country, you have been unmindful of the secret stratagems of the great adversary of souls. You are to-day “led captive by Satan at his will.” The “strong man armed” has bound you, and you feel powerless and helpless. I do not reproach you. If you ever reflect on the past, you have enough to oppress you without any word from man.

You remember the day of your conversion, the consolation you found in religion, the peace which passeth understanding, and the joy which is unspeakable. You remember the joy of your friends when you told them that God was gracious, and the solemn vows and promises you then made to your Heavenly Father. But what a change since then! Your vows are broken, your friends have been disappointed, the joy of your heart has ceased, and you are without hope and without God. But what will you do? It must be a hard lot to lead the life of a backslidden Christian. You cannot forget the past; your hopes of Heaven and your fears of Hell—conscience is ever at work, bringing all these things to your remembrance. What will you do? Soldier, let me lead you back to the Saviour! Like Peter, you have denied the blessed Jesus, but He looks on you to-day and says gently “come back.” He is able to save you.

He is stronger than "the strong man armed." He has saved thousands as bad as you. He is willing to save you. He died on the cross to manifest his love. David, and Peter, and thousands like them, departed from God, but coming to Jesus found him a precious Saviour still. This world can not satisfy you; it will soon be gone.— Oh, why not come back to God, so that when your flesh and heart shall fail, He may be the strength of your heart and your portion forever. If you continue as you are, your life must be miserable, and dying, you will have no hope. Oh, that our merciful God may help you to return! —

But it may be, soldier, that you answer my question with this language: "I am not a Christian." What are you then? A mariner on a stormy ocean, without a compass and without a star; a pilgrim in a dreary wilderness, without a father and without a home; a *sinner born to die, and without a Saviour!* Why are you not a Christian? Perhaps you have never tried to answer that question. That you are not a Christian is not because it is not to your advantage to be one, not because you have not been invited; not because you have not had opportunity, nor because you have never felt the necessity of being a Christian. Why, then, let me ask, are you not a Christian? I will answer this question for you, and I pray God that the truth which I shall now tell you may be sanctified to your good! *It is because you have been lulled into a deathlike slumber by the enemy of souls.* As the ship-master came to Jonah, so come I to you! "What meanest thou, oh, sleeper? Arise, call upon thy God!" It is passing strange that you should have lived so long in this land of Gospel light, without being greatly concerned for your soul's salvation. The earth beneath and around you, and the sky above you, have told you of God; your soul is conscious of its own existence and of its immer-

talities, and the Bible tells you that your future eternal destiny depends upon your acceptance or rejection of the terms of the Gospel. "How is it that you have no faith?"

Soldier! let me invite you to become a Christian. You doubtless remember that you have heard this invitation before now. In the church, at home, your minister has often urged you to give your heart to God. Perhaps a fond mother has wept over her wandering boy, and urged the same request. Sisters, fair and gentle,—oh, how you would love to hear their voices to-day!—have entreated you to be reconciled to God. You have not yielded. You are still sleeping—sinning still. Oh, put off your return to God no longer. By the shortness of time and the uncertainty of life, I urge you to repent. Many years of your time are already past, and your heart, in its throbbings, is beating your funeral march to the grave. At best you can expect the years of your pilgrimage to be only "three score years and ten." How few live out the full measure of their days! But these are times of violence. Hundreds have fallen on your right hand and on your left. You have seen them die. Neither youth nor strength could save them. The enemy still threatens. He is cruel as the grave.—Other fields must be made red with human gore, *Soldier, you may fall.* Oh, be prepared; and then, living, you will be brave—and dying, you will fall a blessed martyr! But I urge you to repent on other grounds. The love of Jesus should induce you to be religious. He loved you and gave himself for you. On the cross he suffered a bitter agony and died to redeem your soul. Will you let him die in vain? He loves you still, and is now interceding for you in Heaven. How matchless is this love,—*pleading* love for rebellious man! Oh, soldier, *believe* that he loves you! it will restrain you from sin, it will bind you to the cross, it will soothe

your aching heart. I might say more to you on this interesting subject, but perhaps I have already taxed you long enough. I now commend you "to God and the word of his grace which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among the saints in light." If you are willing to become a Christian, be not afraid that Christ will cast you off. "Whoso cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out," is the blessed promise which he makes to every sinner. Come to him by forsaking your sins, by believing his word and trusting in it, and by earnest prayer for his atoning mercy. Now, as you read, you may give up your poor heart to God. Would you know how to approach Him? Let this be your language:

Just as I am, without one plea,
But that thy blood was shed for me,
And that thou bid'st me come to thee,
Oh, Lamb of God, I come!